

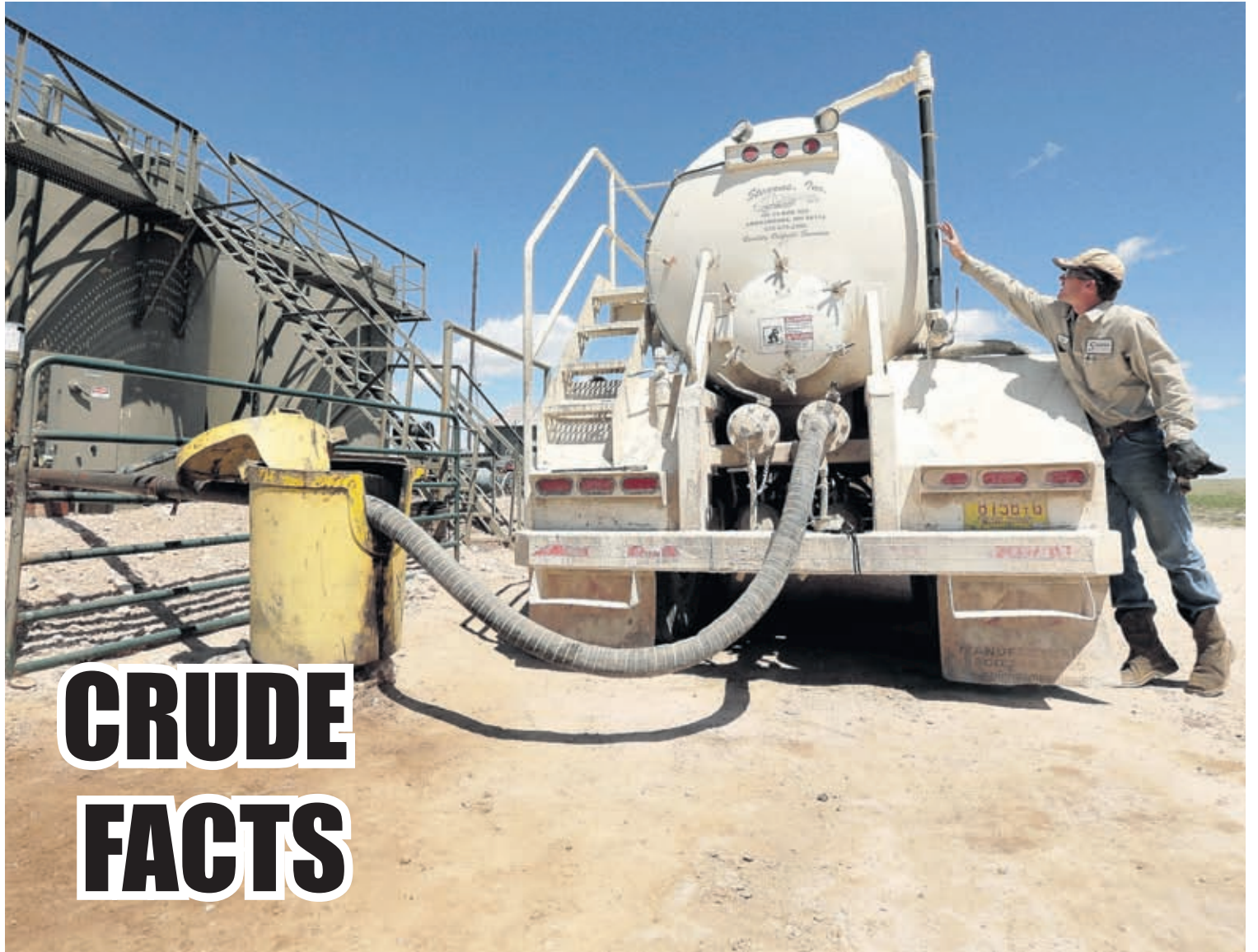
Ukraine war ups pressure for U.S. oil; industry faces hurdles

By MATTHEW BROWN and
SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — In the oil fields of northern Montana, industry veteran Mac McDermott watched crude prices whipsaw from \$75 a barrel in January to more than \$120 as Russia pressed its war in Ukraine, then down again when coronavirus worries in China raised the specter of a global slowdown.

McDermott said his family-owned company will modestly increase drilling if oil prices stabilize. But for the next few months, he's waiting on the sidelines and struggling to get enough workers to watch over roughly 100 oil wells the company operates. That includes some wells idled during the pandemic that he's been trying to bring online since last year.

President Joe Biden's move to ban Russian oil imports over its invasion of Ukraine was met with Republican demands to boost U.S. production to address high gasoline prices.



CRUDE FACTS

In this April 24, 2015, filephoto, a worker empties oilfield wastewater from a tank truck into storage tanks on Carl and Justin Johnson's ranch near Crossroads, N.M.

Continued on next page

Associated Press

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT 7 DAYS A WEEK

SUNDAY:	MONDAY:	TUESDAY:	WEDNESDAY:	THURSDAY:	FRIDAY:	SATURDAY:
TICO KOCK STEEL DRUM 4 - 6pm	ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	JEAN PAUL SAXOPHONIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	CARLOS ORLATE SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm	MARRYBELL MADURO SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm	RICKY THOMAS GUITAR 7 - 9pm	ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm

MARRYBELL MADURO
SINGER
6:30 - 8:30pm

Happy Hour
12-1 / 4-6 / 9-10

PREMIUM
BRANDS

KARAOKE
HAPPY HOUR
9:00 - 11:00pm

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In this April 24, 2015, file photo, pumpjacks work in a field near Lovington, N.M.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

The White House, too, called for more drilling and cited the war as it shelved Biden's campaign pledge to curb drilling on public lands because of climate change.

Yet political rhetoric about quickly ramping up U.S. crude output is at odds with the industry's reality: There's not enough workers to rapidly expand, scant money to invest in drilling and wariness that today's high prices won't last, according to industry representatives, analysts and state officials. "It would be great to produce more domestically," McDermott said. "(But) it's so volatile. ... We haven't had any access to capital for years. If we drilled, money would have to come from existing production. It's a risky business."

Republicans from energy states have brushed past the industry's logistical constraints to pin blame for slow U.S. oil growth on Democrats and Biden. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Montana Sen. Steve Daines have

called for American energy to be "unleashed" and more public lands opened to drilling. Daines accused Democrats of using the Russia oil ban to cover up a supposed scheme to "ban all oil."

The U.S. doesn't import much Russian oil and Biden's administration has effectively halted new oil or natural gas lease sales from federal lands and waters. But it's approved almost 4,000 new drilling permits on federal lands and companies have thousands more stockpiled. White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said companies should use those permits to "go get more supply out of the ground."

Federal energy reserves account for about a quarter of U.S. oil, with the remainder coming from private, tribal and state land. Pumping rates overall slowly increased during Biden's first year as the industry climbed out of the pandemic, when oil future prices briefly dipped below \$0 a barrel.

Obstacles to more U.S. oil are surmountable, according to analysts, yet will take months to work through and it could be late this year or early next before a significant production increase materializes.

"It's going to be a slower ramp up for fields like ours," McDermott said. "Everybody in the industry would say if we have a consistent price, then you know what you would get for an extended period of time and it's easy to make business decisions."

In the short term, the world's looking to other sources. The United Arab Emirates said last week it would urge OPEC to consider boosting oil output, which sent oil prices tumbling. Saudi Arabia alone has roughly 2 million barrels a day of additional capacity standing by, said Rice University energy researcher Jim Krane. By comparison, total U.S. production last year was about 11 million barrels a day.

Even with favorable conditions — strong prices, politi-

cal pressure and less-cautious shareholders — companies in the U.S. could see production rise by just over 1 million barrels daily by the end of the year, said Robert Johnston with Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy.

Some of the biggest U.S. reserves are offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. However, the massive platforms used in deep Gulf waters take years to finance, build and put into place.

A near-term crude boost would have to come from onshore oil resources already developed, such as the Permian Basin in New Mexico and Texas and the Bakken of North Dakota and Montana, said Andy McConn with Enverus, an energy analytics company whose data is used by industry and government agencies.

Even in those areas, there's no way to simply crank open the spigot immediately. The most easily accessible reserves already have been drilled, McConn said.

"There's not a lot of low-hanging fruit," he said.

Some oil producing regions already were bouncing back as the industry shakes off its pandemic slowdown, particularly the Permian Basin — the nation's busiest oil patch with 45,000 wells drilled over the past decade, according to the Energy Information Administration. Other oil patches that could see expansions include Oklahoma's Mid-continent area and Colorado's D-J Basin, McConn said.

Operators in the Permian Basin described growth as steady since last spring. By January, they topped 5 million barrels a day.

Still, the mood this time around is different. "It's not a 'drill baby drill' type of mentality like there was before," said Stephen M. Robertson with the Permian Basin Petroleum Association.

Multiple factors are tempering a production boom, he said, including volatile prices, labor issues and longer wait times for parts to be fabricated and supplies shipped. Even the custom cowboy boots favored by some workers have been hard to come by.

"It's not just one factor that is telling the industry out here what it should do. It's not just high prices," Robertson said.

If the conflict in Ukraine drags on, prices stay high and the logistical hurdles are overcome, companies could move into relatively untapped fields, including Wyoming's Powder River Basin and Utah's Uinta Basin.

But it won't be anything like booms that swept through those regions over the past decade, drawing thousands of workers who overwhelmed housing and other services and transformed rural communities into centers of industry.

Larry Scott, an engineer who has worked in the oil business for decades and now represents a portion of the Permian Basin as a Republican in the New Mexico Legislature, said oil and gas companies still have to conquer the labor challenge. "You can't ramp up if you can't find qualified people to do it," he said. □

House passes bill to prohibit discrimination based on hair

By FARNOUSH AMIRI

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Black people who wear hairstyles like Afros, cornrows or tightly coiled twists should not face bias in society, school and the workplace, the U.S. House said Friday in voting to make it explicit that such discrimination is a violation of federal civil rights law. "There are folks in this society who think because your hair is kinky, it is braided, it is in knots or it is not straightened blonde and light brown, that you somehow are not worthy of access," Democratic Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, the lead sponsor of the bill, said during debate on the House floor. "Well, that's discrimination."

The House voted 235-to-189 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of hair texture and hairstyles. The bill now goes to the Senate, where its fate is uncertain. President Joe Biden has already said he would sign the bill, known as the Crown Act, into law. All but 14 Republicans voted against the measure, calling it unnecessary and a distraction. They said protections against hair discrimination already exist in several federal laws.

"This is what the Democrats are focused on," said Ohio



Deanna Cook, left, poses for a photograph with her mother Colleen at their home in Malden, Mass., Tuesday, March 15, 2022.

Associated Press

Republican Rep. Jim Jordan. "Fourteen months of chaos and we're doing a bill on hair."

But House Democrats noted that, in several instances, judges have dismissed civil rights cases on the basis that the law does not directly cover discrimination on the basis of hair. The House bill makes clear that hair is in fact included.

Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, who is the first Somali-American lawmaker in Congress, called the opposition from her GOP col-

leagues "quite disheartening."

"These members, who are mostly male and white, who have never experienced this kind of discrimination, who don't have the ability to actually speak to it ... really should leave it up to the policymakers who have done the work and who have experienced this level of discrimination," the progressive lawmaker said in an interview Friday.

In addition to Afros, cornrows and twists, the bill mentions protections for

other hairstyles and textures of styles that often draw prejudice against Black people.

Supporters pointed to a 2019 study by Dove that showed that one in five Black women working in office or sales settings have said they had to alter their natural hair. The study also found Black students are far more likely to be suspended for dress code or hair violations.

Coleman, a New Jersey Democrat, began to work on the proposal after two

incidents of discrimination made national headlines. One involved Mya and Deanna Cook of Malden, Massachusetts.

In 2017, the twin sisters were told by their high school staff to remove their box braids. They refused, saying the policy was discriminatory and unevenly enforced. School administrators told them that the ban on hair extensions had been designed to "foster a culture that emphasizes education rather than style, fashion or materialism."

For refusing to comply, Deanna, a runner who had qualified for the state finals, was kicked off the school track team. Mya was removed from the softball team and told she couldn't attend the prom.

"It's such a shock that it doesn't matter who you are, how old you are, what you are — when people have hatred towards a certain group, they don't care. They will treat you in that type of way," Deanna Cook told The Associated Press in an interview. "That's why we need the Crown Act because kids are being hurt from this so badly."

The Massachusetts attorney general eventually stepped in and ordered school officials to abandon the rule, which they did. □

Tennessee guard members safe despite Russian reports

By ALI SWENSON

Three current and former members of the Tennessee National Guard are safe and accounted for, despite a Russian newspaper's false report that the men were killed while fighting in Ukraine.

All three men named in a Russian news report, two of whom are still serving in the Tennessee National Guard, are alive and well — and no U.S. military personnel are currently on orders in Ukraine, National Guard Bureau spokesman Wayne Hall said in a phone interview Friday.

The false claim began circulating Thursday after the Russian newspaper Pravda published a story

and tweets claiming the three Americans, whom it identified by name and as "mercenaries," had been "eliminated." It cited a pro-Russian militia in Ukraine's Donetsk region, which said it had identified the deceased using a Tennessee flag and other personal belongings left in a backpack near the remains.

In response to the false story, Tennessee National Guard spokesman Lt. Col. Marlin Malone said Friday that the military had confirmed the named individuals' whereabouts and "they are not in Ukraine."

Malone said the Tennessee National Guard is "monitoring the situation and will aid the members as needed."

The National Guard Bureau said in a statement on Thursday that it believed Russian media targeted the individuals because they appeared in articles associated with a 2018 deployment to Ukraine, which included members of the Tennessee National Guard's 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment. That mission included the development of instructors, firing ranges, training areas, equipment and instrumentation requirements, and a realistic operational training environment, according to the statement.

"All members of the Tennessee National Guard returned safely to their home state in 2019 after a successful mission," the state-



Tennessee National Guard troops board a plane in Smyrna, Tenn., to go to Washington, Thursday, June 4, 2020.

Associated Press

ment said. Pravda's false article, which was still live on its website Friday, is one of many distorted claims that have emerged from Rus-

sian media in recent weeks as part of a disinformation campaign to bolster domestic support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. □

Drought-stricken California imposes new round of water cuts

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)

— California's urban water users and farmers who rely on supplies from state reservoirs will get less than planned this year as fears of a third consecutive dry year become reality, state officials announced Friday. Water agencies that serve 27 million people and 750,000 acres (303,514 hectares) of farmland, will get just 5% of what they've requested this year from state supplies beyond what's needed for critical activities such as drinking and bathing.

That's down from the 15% allocation state officials had announced in January, after a wet December fueled hopes of a lessening drought.

But a wet winter didn't materialize and unless several more inches of rain falls this month, the January-March period will be the driest start to a California year at least a century. That's when most of the state's rain and snow typically falls.

Mandatory restrictions on using water for outdoor activities like landscaping and other purposes may come from local water agencies as they continue to grapple with limited supplies, said Karla Nemeth, director of the California Department of Water Resources. Local water agencies that know their communities'



In this Aug. 22, 2021, file photo, a family walks over cracked mud near Lake Oroville's shore as water levels remain low due to continuing drought conditions in Oroville, Calif.

Associated Press

unique needs are better poised than state officials to set water use restrictions, Nemeth said.

"I think with this reduced allocation we are going to see more urban areas in California move into some kind of mandatory water conservation," she said in an interview.

State officials will continue urging people to voluntarily cut water use by 15%, an amount designed to get Californians' collective water use back to what it was during the last drought, which lasted from 2012 to 2016, Nemeth said.

Statewide water use in January actually went up 2.6% compared to the same

month in 2020, due to dry conditions and warm temperatures.

About a third of Southern California's water comes from state supplies, mostly routed through the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, which serves 19 million people. Abel Hagekhalil, the district's general manager, said in a statement Friday that the public needs to do more to save water.

"We all need to take this drought more seriously and significantly step up our water-saving efforts to help preserve our dropping storage levels and ensure we have the water we need into the summer and fall,"

he said.

California is in its second acute drought in less than a decade, and scientists say the U.S. West is broadly experiencing the worst megadrought in 1,200 years, made more intense by climate change.

People adapted their water use during the state's last drought, in part by ripping up sprinkler-hungry lawns and replacing them with drought-resistant landscaping.

Many of those water-saving habits stuck.

But the dry conditions that began anew in 2020 are demanding more conservation, as reservoirs such as Lake Oroville and Shasta

Lake remain below historical levels and less water from melting snow is expected to trickle down the mountains this spring.

Current predictions estimate the state will have about 57% of its historical median runoff this April through July, said Alan Haynes, hydrologist in charge for the California Nevada River Forecast Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Melted snow traditionally provides about a third of the state's water supply.

A very wet December put water content in the snow at 160% of normal levels, but isn't resulting in as much water runoff as expected because warmer temperatures are causing some of that water to evaporate rather than flow into rivers and streams as it melts, said Nemeth, the Department of Water Resources director.

A persistent lack of water could produce a range of negative consequences for California, including farmers following fields and endangered salmon and other fish dying.

The water providers that rely on state supplies have a certain amount they of water they can request from the state, and state officials make determinations through the winter on how much the providers will get based on supply. □

Bird flu case forces killing of 5.3 million chickens in Iowa



In this Oct. 21, 2015, file photo, cage-free chickens walk in a fenced pasture at an organic farm near Waukon, Iowa.

Associated Press

By DAVID PITT
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The confirmation of bird flu

at another Iowa egg-laying farm will force the killing of more than 5 million chickens, state officials said Friday.

It's the second confirmed case of avian influenza in Buena Vista County, about 160 miles (257 kilometers) northwest of Des Moines, but the latest outbreak is at an operation with 5.3 million chickens. The earlier case was at a farm with about 50,000 turkeys.

The latest case confirmed by the state Department of Agriculture means nearly 12.6 million chicken and turkeys in at least eight states

have been killed or will be destroyed soon.

Spread of the disease is largely blamed on the droppings or nasal discharge of infected wild birds, such as ducks and geese, which can contaminate dust and soil. Infected wild birds have been found in at least 24 states, and the virus has been circulating in migrating waterfowl in Europe and Asia for nearly a year.

The first Iowa case was identified on March 1 in a backyard flock of 42 ducks and geese in Pottawattamie County in western

Iowa. Another egg-laying chicken farm with nearly 916,000 birds was reported with the virus on March 10 in Taylor County in southwest Iowa.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the cases in birds do not present an immediate public health concern. No human cases of the avian influenza virus have been detected in the United States. It remains safe to eat poultry products. Cooking of poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165 °F kills bacteria and viruses. □

West accuses Russia of using UN council to spread propaganda

By EDITH M. LEDERER

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Six Western nations accused Russia of using the U.N. Security Council to launder disinformation, spread propaganda and justify an unprovoked attack on Ukraine on Friday, and the United States again warned that Moscow's claim the U.S. has biological warfare laboratories in Ukraine "is really a potential false flag effort in action."

The meeting was originally intended for a vote on Russia's draft resolution on humanitarian relief for Ukraine, which has been widely criticized for making no mention of Moscow's invasion of its neighbor. But Russia canceled the vote Thursday and announced it would use the meeting instead to raise what it called new allegations of U.S. involvement in biological warfare activities. Those have been repeatedly denied by both the United States and Ukraine.

The six Western nations -- U.S., UK, France, Albania, Ireland and Norway -- delivered a joint statement just before the session saying: "This meeting and these lies are designed for one purpose, to deflect responsibility for Russia's war of choice and the humanitarian catastrophe it has caused."

They said that Russia, not Ukraine, has long maintained a biological weapons program in violation of international law and has a well-documented history of using chemical weapons. And they accused Russia of abusing its responsibilities and privileges as a permanent member of the Security Council and subverting the council's mandate to ensure international peace and security, calling its "horrific campaign of violence against the Ukrainian people ... deeply shameful."

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, who read the joint statement, later told the Security Council not to forget why they were meeting -- "because Russia knew its cynical ploy to pass an exculpatory resolution had failed" and it



Russia's ambassador Vasily Nebenzya speaks at the end of a meeting of the United Nations Security Council at U.N. headquarters, Friday, March 18, 2022.

Associated Press

had to cancel Friday's vote. The resolution would have needed at least nine "yes" votes in the 15-member council and no veto by a permanent member to be approved. Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzya indicated it didn't have the votes, accusing the West, and especially the U.S. and Albania, on Thursday of using "unprecedented pressure" on U.N. member nations to oppose the measure.

On Friday, Thomas-Greenfield reiterated what she told the council at a March 11 session called by Russia on its original bioweapons allegations: "Ukraine does not have a biological weapons program. There are no Ukrainian biological weapons laboratories -- not near Russia's border, not anywhere."

Ukraine only has public health facilities supported by the United States, the World Health Organization, and other governments and international institutions, she said.

Reiterating the Biden administration's concern about a potential false flag effort, Thomas-Greenfield said, "We continue to believe it is possible that Russia may be planning to use chemical or biological agents against the Ukrai-

nian people."

Nebenzya responded by calling accusations that Russia intends to deploy biological and chemical weapons against Ukraine "real cynicism."

"We've already warned about the fact that we know, and we officially warned ... about Ukrainian nationalists using chemical agents in some regions to carry out a provocation and then accuse Russia of having done it," he said. "This is a false flag operation."

Last week, Nebenzya said Russia's Defense Ministry has documents charging that Ukraine has at least 30 biological laboratories carrying out "very dangerous biological experiments" involving pathogens, and the work "is being done and funded and supervised by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency of the United States."

He circulated a 69-page document to council members at Friday's meeting and claimed that the Ministry of Defense had received new details over the last week "which allow us to state that the components for biological weapons were being created on the territory of Ukraine" to implement a 2005 American-Ukrainian agreement.

"Put simply the Ukraine authorities gave the Pentagon carte blanche on the territory of Ukraine to carry out dangerous biological experiments there," Nebenzya asserted.

Ukraine does own and operate a network of biological labs that have gotten funding and research support from the U.S. They are part of an initiative called the Biological Threat Reduction Program that aims to reduce the likelihood of deadly outbreaks, whether natural or manmade. The U.S. efforts date back to work in the 1990s to dismantle the former Soviet Union's program for weapons of mass destruction.

"The labs are not secret," Filippa Lentzos, a senior lecturer in science and international security at King's College London, said in an email to The Associated Press last week. "They are not being used in relation to bioweapons. This is all disinformation."

Britain's U.N. Ambassador Barbara Woodward, referring to the March 11 meeting called by Russia, said Friday: "It was nonsense then, and it is nonsense now."

U.N. disarmament chief Izumi Nakamitsu reiterated what she told the council last week: The United Nations is not aware of any

such biological weapons program" and has no mandate to investigate the Russian claims.

Russia's Nebenzya called the material it released on March 11 and on Friday "only the tip of the iceberg." He said the Ministry of Defense is receiving and analyzing more new material and will continue to keep the Security Council and the international community informed "about the unlawful activity carried out by the Pentagon on Ukrainian territory."

Russia presented its draft humanitarian resolution on Tuesday, a day after France and Mexico announced that their own humanitarian resolution on Ukraine was being moved from the Security Council, where it was certain to face a Russian veto, to the 193-member General Assembly, where there are no vetoes.

The France-Mexico draft resolution would demand "an immediate cessation of hostilities" and deplore "the dire humanitarian consequences of the hostilities against Ukraine," provisions not in the Russian resolution.

French Ambassador Nicolas De Riviere told reporters Thursday the resolution will be presented to the General Assembly next week. Britain's Woodward expressed hope that it would get more than the 141 votes received by a March 2 resolution demanding an immediate halt to Moscow's offensive against Ukraine and withdrawal of all Russian troops. □

ARUBA CLEAN



IS MORE DUSHI

U.N. food agency official alarmed by Afghan food, fuel prices

By KATHY GANNON

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)

— An official with the U.N. food agency warned Friday that with Russia's war in Ukraine taking an increasing toll on the global economy, the ripples of that conflict will further increase food and fuel prices in the desperately poor Afghanistan.

Since the Taliban takeover in mid-August, Afghanistan has been sinking deeper into poverty and economic crisis. As many as 95% of the country's 38 million people don't have enough to eat or money to buy the food. Shelley Thakral, a spokeswoman for the World Food Program, said that food prices in Afghanistan rose nearly 40% over the last eight months. The WFP has spent \$1 billion feeding millions of Afghans this year but needs another \$1.6 billion, Thakral added.

"The worrying thing, I think and this includes Afghanistan as well as all the other hunger spots across the world, is the rise in food and fuel prices," said Thakral.

So far, donor countries have not sidelined Afghanistan but she said they "have to dig deeper" as Europe deals with the shockwaves of the war and the



Shelley Thakral, spokeswoman for the World Food Program, speaks during an interview with The Associated Press in Kabul, Afghanistan, Friday, March 18, 2022.

Associated Press

3.2 million refugees who have fled Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion Feb. 24.

Thakral's remarks echoed those of U.N. refugee chief Filippo Grandi, who warned during a visit to Kabul on Tuesday that the war in Ukraine war could siphon off money from humanitarian crisis elsewhere, including in Afghanistan, and that soaring food prices

could cripple humanitarian efforts.

While most of Afghanistan's wheat supplies come from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Thakral said the increasing food and fuel cost as a result of the war could add up to 20% to the costs of providing humanitarian assistance.

When the Taliban swept to power, international donor money, which paid more

than 80% percent of Afghanistan's bills, dried up and the country's economy went into free fall.

There was food on Kabul markets on Friday but Masihullah, standing by his small grocery stall, said no one has money. Most people don't have jobs, Masihullah said. Like many Afghan men, he uses only one name.

A sack of flour costs near-

ly \$28 and most Afghans are now below the poverty line, which means they earn \$1.90 a day or less.

Thakral said 80% of Afghans are in debt because they have had to borrow to pay for food or medicines and even working Afghans look to the WFP for food aid because they don't make enough to be able to afford the food on the market.

A Human Rights Watch report released Thursday said that since January, about 13,000 newborns have died from malnutrition and hunger-related diseases in Afghanistan and 3.5 million children need nutritional support.

"If the countries we import food from face a challenge, we face a challenge," said Masihullah. "There is war between Russia and Ukraine, so we are affected ... there is a high increase in prices of oil and wheat."

A U.K. pledging summit to be held later this month expects to raise \$4.4 billion to stave off a worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, said Thakral.

"Right now in Afghanistan, what we need to sustain is the attention on the people here," she said. □

Turkey builds massive bridge linking Europe and Asia



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan poses for photos in front of the 1915 Canakkale Bridge, in Çanakkale, western Turkey, Friday, March 18, 2022.

Associated Press

By SUZAN FRASER

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP)

— The president of Turkey, South Korea's prime minister and other officials inaugurated a massive suspension bridge Friday over

the Dardanelles Strait that connects the European and Asian shores of the key waterway.

With a 2,023-meter (6,637 feet) span between its towers, the "1915 Canakkale Bridge" becomes the

world's longest suspension bridge, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

It connects the town of Gelibolu, located in the European side of Turkey's northwestern province of Canakkale, with the town of Lapseki on the Asian side. The bridge allows travelers to cross the Dardanelles — which connects the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara — in just six minutes compared to the previous 1 1/2 hours by ferry, the president said.

"Turkey has overtaken Japan, which has the longest bridge in the world in terms of the midspan, and has taken the first place," Erdogan said during the inauguration ceremony.

The inauguration was timed to coincide with the

107th anniversary of Turkey's World War I naval victory over a joint British and French fleet attacking the Dardanelles. The failure of the naval campaign led to the ill-fated 1915 landings on the Gallipoli peninsula by the allies led by Britain and France along with troops from Australia and New Zealand.

"The 1915 Canakkale Bridge will leave this history of collision and conflict behind and will be a bridge between East and West, starting a new era of peace and prosperity," South Korean Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum said during the ceremony, in reference to the Canakkale region's historic battlefields.

The bridge, which was built by a consortium of Turkish

and South Korean companies, will also strengthen the bonds between Turkey and South Korea, Kim said.

The "1915 Canakkale Bridge" cost 2.5 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) to build but Turkey will save 415 million euros (\$458 million) per year from a reduction of fuel consumption and carbon emissions, Erdogan said. He announced the bridge's toll will be 200 Turkish lira (\$13.60).

The bridge's architecture is awash with symbolism. Its central span of 2,023 meters (6,637 feet) is in recognition of the year 2023, when Turkey celebrates the centenary of the founding of the Turkish Republic following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Erdogan said. □

Spain changes stance, backs Moroccan rule in Western Sahara

By ARITZ PARRA
Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Spain on Friday declared "a new stage" in its strained relations with Morocco after the Spanish prime minister wrote to the Moroccan king, agreeing that having Western Sahara operate autonomously under Rabat's rule is "the most serious, realistic and credible" initiative for resolving a decades-long dispute over the vast African territory. This marked an enormous departure from Spain's earlier stance of considering Morocco's grip on Western Sahara an occupation. The shift followed months of frosty diplomatic relations and led to the announcement of a flurry of visits by Spanish officials to its southern neighbor.

It also opened up disputes within Spain's left-to-center governing coalition. The United Nations has continued to regard Madrid as the colonial administrative power for Western Sahara, even after its annexation by Morocco immediately after Spain abandoned its African province in 1975. Over the years, the Spanish government's official position, along with the European Union's, has been to support a U.N.-sponsored referendum to settle the



Polisario Front soldiers talk during a shooting exercise, near Mehaires, Western Sahara, Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2021.

territory's decolonization. But according to a statement issued by Morocco's royal palace on Friday, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez recognized "the importance of the Sahara issue for Morocco" in a letter to King Mohammed VI. "Spain considers the autonomy initiative presented by Morocco in 2007 as the basis, the most serious, realistic and credible, for resolving the dispute," the royal pal-

ace quoted Sánchez. Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares confirmed the Moroccan announcement. "Today we begin a new stage in our relations with Morocco and finally close a crisis with a strategic partner," he told reporters. He added that the new chapter was "based on mutual respect, compliance with agreements, the absence of unilateral actions and transparency and perma-

nent communication." Relations between Spain and Morocco hit a historical low last year after Spain secretly hosted for medical treatment the leader of the Polisario Front, which has led the yearning for independence by many Saharawis. But when media affiliated with the Moroccan government revealed Brahim Ghali's presence in Spain, Rabat allowed 10,000 people to cross the border into

Ceuta, a Spanish city on the coast of North Africa. That leashed an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Morocco also recalled its ambassador in Madrid and hasn't reinstated her. Abdulah Arabi, who represents the Polisario in Spain, said Sánchez "succumbs to the pressure and blackmail" from Morocco by paying "a toll" to mend their damaged political and diplomatic ties. He said having Western Sahara be autonomous under Morocco is only one of many options that should be voted upon in a referendum. "The solution has to be based on the choice voted by the Saharawi people," Arabi said.

Some 176,000 Saharawi are believed to live in five refugee camps on Algerian soil, east of Western Sahara, in a sweltering desert that many consider no man's land. They rely on humanitarian help and goods from international aid agencies, under the governance of the Polisario Front, which presides over an exiled Sahrawi republic. In late 2020, their frustration over three decades in limbo led to the end of a cease-fire and new hostilities between Polisario forces and the Moroccan army. □

Associated Press

U.S. sanctions Uganda gold dealer, citing illicit Congo origin

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA
KAMPALA, Uganda (AP)

— A Belgian businessman sanctioned by the U.S. over allegations of illicit gold trade in Congo said Friday the action undermines efforts to improve transparency in a region seeing rising official exports of the mineral. The U.S. announced sanctions late Thursday targeting Alain Goetz and African Gold Refinery, a Uganda-based company that has been in business since 2014. The company is among several linked to Goetz that are "involved in the illicit movement of gold valued at hundreds of millions of dollars per year" from Congo, the Treasury Department said in a state-

ment. The illicit movement of gold threatens Congo's peace and stability, it said, charging that more than 90% of Congo's gold is smuggled to neighboring countries such as Uganda and Rwanda where it's "then often refined and exported to international markets, particularly the UAE." Congo's expansive eastern provinces have long been wracked by sporadic armed conflict, and monitoring groups assert that control of the minerals trade fuels the violence. The new sanctions include the blocking of U.S.-based assets owned by Goetz and his companies. But Goetz denied the allegations in a statement

emailed to The Associated Press, saying he has no recent business ties with Congo. "I have not been to (Congo) in more than 20 years," he said. "I have not kept any active contacts within (Congo) either." He warned that sanctions against African Gold Refinery would hurt efforts to improve transparency in the gold business by potentially offering informal traders "a safe haven" again. "International organizations can now easily verify information and quote figures because of the transparency that I laid a foundation for with the launch of African Gold Refinery," he said. "This transparency is what the U.S. has just placed at great risk with these sanc-



Gold miners pan for gold in the Eastern Congo mining town of Kamituga March 13 2021.

Associated Press

tions." The African Gold Refinery, worth \$15 million and the first of its kind in East Africa, drew attention over the

years from activists concerned that minerals from conflict-prone countries in the region were among its raw materials. □

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Bohemian Restaurant & Bar, The Story: French Nomads in Culinary Avant-Garde

Like nomads travel from place to place to find fresh pasture for their livestock, the Nataf family –father Victor with sons David and Gregory - faithfully followed their nose for good food. As young boys, they indulged in their grandparents' culinary joie-de-vivre in the South of France. Tickled by the palette of excellent dishes prepared in their mid-seventies' restaurant in the Alps of France and filled with exquisite taste of their other restaurants in the beautiful island of Porquerolles near St Tropez that made it to a ranking of 13/20 in the Gault Millau restaurant grading. To the Natafs, food is a bohemian experience_ unconventional, eclectic and off the beaten track. Welcome to Bohemian Aruba!

A Grande entrée through a huge, wooden, Moroccan-style door takes you into a foodies Garden of Eden. Big trees stand tall and proudly, lit with hanging lanterns creating a green and romantic lush paradise. There's a playful setting of different-styled tables, including seating under a Colombian Rattan tipi tent, complete the feel of let go alias laissez-faire. The cool bar blinks to New York loft style, think industrial bold. Waiters with hip suspenders and berets add a hint of French flair while lounge music fills the air. The décor is designed by David himself.

David Nataf - Owner

"Thoughts of finger licking dishes fill my mind thinking of my youth. The smell of fresh-baked croissants and chocolate bread hand made by my uncle's brother in law's father "the baker". The restaurant's kitchen fridge stuffed with the most exquisite dishes that my brother

and I consumed secretly after a night out to the frustration of the chef. We were young boys eating away the night with foie gras and loup de mer local branzino."

Tongue melting fondue and raclette, wood oven pizzas with fresh Emmentaler cheese and hand-picked champignons founded his foodie character. Add this to the time he spent at the grandparents' house in the vineyards with fruits, veggies, poultry, and game within hand's reach. What was missing was bought at the weekly farmers market. "I grew up with the farm-to-table concept."



Le Magic

The family magic is translated through David into Bohemian. Starters like Vitello Tonnato, le Ceviche, homemade Foie Gras Terrine or Escargots "A la Bourguignonne" tickle your taste buds. For entrees Whole Shrimps Flambe with Cognac, Grilled 10oz Angus Rib Eye Steak "Maître d'Hôtel" or Braised Lamb Shank ignite passion in your soul. Spicy Moroccan Mahi-Mahi Kebab with chickpea hummus and ratatouille crumble, Paella made with their own fish broth filled with chicken seafood and chorizo are other culinary delights but there is much more. Wines are imported directly from France regions, as is the champagne. Italian, Spanish, American and Australian choices complete the list.

Raving reviews on a continuous basis prove that Bohemian has got it! Every Wednesday there is Live Flamenco with Angela Croes, on Thursdays you will enjoy the beautiful live sounds of Angela's violin and on Friday's and Saturday's go with the beat of electro lounge. Live salsa music can be enjoyed on Sunday's.

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Aruba will still require Embarkation/Disembarkation Card before arrival, which is the country's digitized customs and immigration process as well as the Aruba Visitors Insurance.

Visit Aruba.com for the most up-to-date entry requirements and further details.
www.aruba.com/ud/traveler-health-requirements

Safety protocols to consider during your stay in Aruba

- Masks are mandatory at the airport, and at the discretion of establishments. They are recommended at all times social distancing is difficult.
- All other mandatory safety measures have been lifted starting Feb 17th, 2022

Feeling unwell?

Testing positive for Covid-19 while in Aruba
All visitors will be required to comply with the Government of Aruba procedures and protocols if showing symptoms and/or testing posi-



tive for COVID-19 while in Aruba. The mandatory requirements will include isolation, possible relocation and quarantine for close contacts. The complete details can be found in the Isolation Protocol for Visitors (version 4) as published by the Department of Public Health (DVG). □

Flag and Anthem Celebrations



On the 18th of March, Aruba celebrates our Dia di Himno y Bandera, the day in which Aruba got it's own flag and anthem. During this day, locals will celebrate by proudly wearing the colors of our flag, Blue, White, Red and Yellow, as well as adorning cars, houses and themselves with the beautiful Aruba flag.

From the start of the week, various schools had special activities to teach the children about the history and importance of this special day.

The celebration starts with a Protocol Act in presence

of the island's Governor, Alfonso Boekhoudt, during which our prime minister delivered a speech.

Yesterday the island was vibrant with lots of celebrations of Aruba culture. Cultural sites like the Library, Museums, and the National Park all had special activities to commemorate, which included history readings, special walks, and a wide variety of possibilities to truly savor the local cuisine!

Aruba's National Anthem
: 'ARUBA DUSHI TERA'

In the years 1975 and 1976,

the government wanted to give Aruba it's own national anthem and flag, since these two are the symbols that identify of each country. The flag and anthem are symbols of love and patriotism. It was Gilberto François "Betico" Croes who made this special request.

'Aruba Dushi Tera' is the name of our national anthem. The history of this song started in 1951. It was a composition of two very well-known musicians, Rufo Wever and Juan Chabaya "Padu" Lampe. They felt the urge to compose a song that would express the love of our people for our island and the feeling of patriotism of each person.

Together with 'De Trupialen' group and under the guidance of Frère Alexis they managed to put this song in their repertoire with the purpose of making it popular. The song became very popular in a short time. In 1954, they even record-

ed the song on a long play disc. The song was played during every official ceremony of Aruba.

In the 70's installed a comisión consisting of Maybeline Arends-Croes, Rufo Odor, Padu Lampe, Eddy Bennet, Hubert "Lio" Booi y Rufo Wever to see if they could proclaim 'Aruba Dushi tera' as the national anthem. The committee unanimously recommended this to be played on the air waves. By that time, a third verse had been added which stated the cordiality and the love of freedom for our island.

On March 16th, 1976, the island council approved 'Aruba Dushi Tera' as the Aruba's national anthem, and on March 18th, 1976, during an official ceremony at the Wilhelmina Stadium in Dakota, the flag was raised for the first time while 'Aruba Dushi Tera' resonated for the first time as the national anthem of Aruba. The presentation was under the guidance of Maybeline Arends-Croes, together with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Aruba directed by Joy Kock. □

Lyrics of "Aruba Dushi Tera":

Aruba patria aprecia,
nos cuna venera,
chikito y simpel bo por ta
pero si respeta.

Refrain:
O, Aruba, Dushi tera,
nos baranca tan stima
nos amor pa bo t'asina
grandi
cu n'tin nada pa kibrel!

Bo playanan tan admira
cu palma tur dorna,
bo escudo y bandera ta
orguyo di nos tur!

Refrain:
O, Aruba, Dushi tera, etc.
nos baranca tan stima.
nos amor pa bo t'asina
grandi
cu n'tin nada pa kibr'e!

Grandesa di bo pueblo ta
su gran cordialidad,
cu Dios por guia y conserva
su amor pa libertad!

Refrain:
O, Aruba, dushi tera,
nos baranca tan stima.
Nos amor pa bo t' asina
grandi
cu n'tin nada pa kibr'e!
cu n'tin nada pa kibr'e!



Pressure mounts for multinationals in Russia to leave

By TALI ARBEL
AP Business Writer

As the war in Ukraine drags on, international companies still in Russia are coming under increasing pressure to leave.

Some seem to be determined to stay, some say they are reconsidering or trying to figure out an exit and some aren't speaking at all — a testament to the fraught nature of the situation.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is stepping up the country's pleas to pressure companies to exit Russia. In an address to Congress Wednesday, he asked lawmakers to press U.S. businesses still operating in Russia to leave, saying the Russian market is "flooded with our blood."

"Make sure that the Russians do not receive a single penny that they use to destroy our people in Ukraine," Zelenskyy said.

In a separate Tuesday address, Zelenskyy called out food companies Nestle and Mondelez, consumer goods makers Unilever and Johnson & Johnson, European banks Raiffeisen and Societe General, electronics giants Samsung and LG, chemicals maker BASF, and pharmaceuticals Bayer and Sanofi, saying they and "dozens of other companies" have not left the Russian market.

The U.S. and its allies have already put a slew of sanctions in place aimed at crippling the Russian economy. Hundreds of international companies have announced that they are curtailing operations in Russia. Companies that have kept operations in Russia say they provide essential services, like food or medicine, that are unaffected by sanctions. In some industries, like hotels or restaurants, it's difficult to shut down because of franchising deals. They have said they don't want to punish their employees.

There's also a risk that the Russian government will expropriate Western assets like factories if they are abandoned. Koch Industries, whose billionaire CEO



In this Feb. 9, 2011, photo, a shopper passes Nabisco products, a Mondelez International brand: Premium saltines, Triscuits, Ritz crackers and Wheat Thins, at a supermarket in Los Angeles.

Charles Koch is famous for funding conservative causes, dug into that position, saying Wednesday that it has two glass manufacturing factories in Russia that employ 600 people, and it's not going to abandon that business.

"We will not walk away from our employees there or hand over these manufacturing facilities to the Russian government so it can operate and benefit from them," said Koch President Dave Robertson in a statement. "Doing so would only put our employees there at greater risk and do more harm than good."

Major European and U.S. consumer-goods companies like Unilever, PepsiCo and Nestle say they are scaling back business to focus on essentials, but haven't exited Russia. For example, candy and pet food company Mars, which has been in Russia for decades and has nearly 6,000 employees and several factories there, said last week that it would suspend new investments in the country as well as imports and exports into Russia, and pause ads and social media.

But Mars will continue to sell pet food and food, saying

it has an "essential role in feeding the Russian people and pets." Profits from the Russia business will go to humanitarian causes. Mars did not respond to questions Thursday.

This strategy falls short, said Raj Bhala, a professor at the University of Kansas law school. "We want to do everything short of violence to stop the war," he said. "It is better, as President Zelenskyy is suggesting, to inflict pain on everyday Russian consumers in the hopes that they may rally, or rally further, against their government and against the war."

There are other companies that consider their operations essential. Eli Lilly, the drugmaker, has said that sanctions don't apply to medicine and that it has a responsibility to Russian patients. Sanofi said Thursday that it would suspend advertising in Russia and

spending not related to its medicines and vaccines. But it remains committed to providing medicine there and continuing clinical trials.

Major fast-food companies like McDonald's shut down restaurants they owned; franchising agreements complicated the matter for some others. Parent companies don't control franchisees and can't order them to close, said Michael Seid, the founder of MSA Worldwide, a global franchise advisory firm. The franchisees run the business independently, and they are responsible for wages, food and other costs.

Even if Russia franchisees wanted to close, they face pressure to keep them open under Russia's President Vladimir Putin, Seid added.

"The ultimate franchisor in Russia is Putin and I wouldn't want to be sitting in Russia

closing my doors if Mr. Putin doesn't want me to close them," he said.

Still, those restaurants may have difficulties getting their usual food supplies, making it tough to serve popular menu items, said Adam Werner, global co-leader of the restaurants, hospitality and leisure practice at AlixPartners.

Restaurant Brands International, the Toronto-based company that owns Burger King, said Thursday that it has begun the process of exiting its 15% stake in a joint venture that operates around 800 Burger King restaurants in Russia. Burger King said it contacted the Russian operator of its restaurants, Alexander Kolobov, and demanded that he suspend operations, but he refused. In the meantime, Burger King said it has suspended corporate support for the Russian market.

"Would we like to suspend all Burger King operations immediately in Russia? Yes. Are we able to enforce a suspension of operations today? No," said David Shear, Burger King's international president, in a statement. Some companies continue to review their position in Russia as pressure mounts. The Austrian bank Raiffeisen said Thursday that it is "assessing all strategic options for the future of Raiffeisenbank Russia, up to and including a carefully managed exit."

Multinational companies have to weigh their desire for operations in Russia when, or if, the war is over with the potential hit to their reputations and harm their business in larger Western markets. In Poland, some consumers are saying they won't shop at stores owned by a French company that continues to operate in Russia, according to local media. □



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CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 44 Basket-
1 Beat ball's
walkers Archibald

5 Pants line

9 Stone unit

10 Cleaner
scent

12 Studio
sign

13 Brighten

14 Daily grind

16 Chaotic
spot

17 Tokyo's
old name

18 Frisk

20 Evolution
expert

22 Taverns

23 Like bar
beer

25 Study all
night

28 Confi-
dential

32 Milliner's
ribbon

34 Ariz.
neighbor

35 Suitable

36 It's under
Wayne
Mansion

38 Piton,
for one

40 Words to
a hitcher

41 Deserve

42 Choose

43 Cincinnati
team

DOWN

1 Alaska
neighbor

2 Stump
figure

3 Brace

4 Fasten
one's
seat belt

5 Wintry
weather

6 Long
swimmer

7 Warring
woman

8 Detroit
nickname

9 Hollowed
out



Yesterday's answer

11 Some
lights

15 Tijuana bar

19 Dance
moves

21 Area of
develop-

24 "What
happened
next?"

25 Deep
gorge

26 Drake or
Dre

27 Duds

29 Sulking

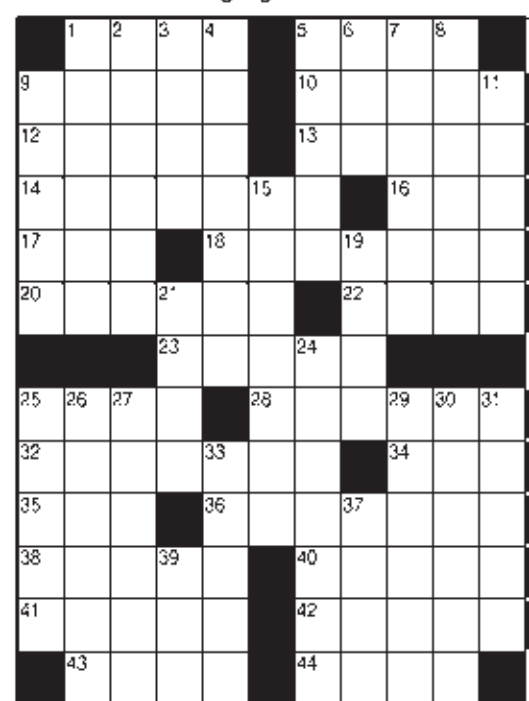
30 Gadget

31 News
item

33 Aids
illegally

37 Soda
choice

39 Young
one



3-19

A X Y D L B A A X R
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-19

CRYPTOQUOTE

B L I Q T H X K Y I M N V J B W

X B M N K Y I M . T L P C Q I H C .

Q I H C E P I Q I H T L I M . O T G L

J I P

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: I ALWAYS TELL YOUNG GIRLS. SURROUND YOURSELF WITH GOODNESS. I LEARNED EARLY ON HOW TO GET THE HATERS OUT OF MY LIFE. MICHELLE OBAMA

Trevor Noah says Grammys can entertain, tackle world issues



Trevor Noah appears at the 63rd annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles on March 14, 2021.

Associated Press

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr.
AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Grammy Awards is a festive vibe celebrating music's best, but host Trevor Noah says the show may touch on some serious topics such as the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

"I think the show is going to find the right place and the right space to do something," said the Emmy winner, who will host the April 3 show in Las Vegas. He believes some music artists will express their thoughts on Ukraine along with other meaningful topics that are "close to their hearts."

"It's one of those interesting balances in life we try to achieve, which is acknowledging what's happening in the world whilst allowing yourself the grace to celebrate some of the

moments that are also going on," said the comedian and host of "The Daily Show with Trevor Noah" on Comedy Central.

Noah said most of his show's coverage has focused on Ukraine, so he's looking forward to an entertaining night at the Grammys — a place where world issues can be acknowledged as well.

"I think it's also important for us to be able to take a break from everything," he said. "That's the ultimate quandary we face. Is it important to highlight issues around the world? Definitely. It's also important to celebrate things that are happening in the world."

Noah returns for his second hosting stint at the Grammys, which airs live on CBS and Paramount+. The ceremony shifted from

Los Angeles to Las Vegas because of the rising COVID-19 cases and the omicron variant in January, with organizers citing "too many risks" to hosting the performance-filled show at the time.

Last year, the Grammys had a music festival vibe with parts of the show held outdoors in an intimate in-person setting with music artists mixed with pre-taped performances. But for the upcoming ceremony, Noah anticipates a hybrid model that includes fans at the MGM Grand Garden Arena.

"I think the live element does bring in an energy but then you do sacrifice a little bit of that intimacy," said Noah, who took a careful approach hosting "The Daily Show" from his New York apartment during the pandemic last year but could not pass up the offer to host his first Grammys in person.

"But it's nice to have fans cheering for their favorite artist," he said. "It's nice to see the performances because one of the biggest reasons the Grammys is my favorite award show is that it is a live music festival."

With the show being in Las Vegas, Noah calls the city a "perfect place to have a celebration." He expects an entertaining show with several performers set to hit the stage including Olivia Rodrigo, BTS, Billie Eilish, Lil Nas X, Jack Harlow and Brandi Carlile.

The multitasking Jon Batiste is the leading nominee with 11 nods in a variety of genres including R&B, jazz, American roots music, classical and music video. Justin Bieber, Doja Cat and H.E.R. are tied for the second-most nominations with eight apiece.

"I think it's going to be a celebration of an industry coming back to life," Noah said. "I think a lot of the artists will enjoy Vegas. Nobody lives there. There's an element of this (show) that's like a music camp. I think it's going to bring a different energy, and I'm excited to be a part of it."

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24/7

Tech leaders face threat of prison under new UK on-line bill



In this Sept. 28, 2020 file photo, a view of the TikTok app logo, in Tokyo.

Associated Press

By KELVIN CHAN
AP Business Writer
LONDON (AP) — Tech bosses face criminal prosecution if they fail to comply with proposed British rules aimed at ensuring people are safe online, the U.K. government said Thursday as it unveiled the draft legislation in Parliament.

The ambitious but controversial online safety bill would give regulators wide-ranging powers to crack down on digital and social media companies like Google, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok.

Authorities in the United Kingdom are the vanguard of a global movement to rein in the power of tech platforms and make them more responsible for harmful material such as child sex abuse, racist content, bullying, fraud and other harmful material that proliferates on their platforms. Similar efforts are underway in the European Union and United States.

While the internet has transformed people's lives, "tech firms haven't been held to account when harm, abuse and criminal behavior have run riot on their platforms," U.K. Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries said in a statement. "If we fail to act, we risk sacrificing the wellbeing and innocence of countless generations of children to the power of unchecked algorithms."

The bill faces debate in Parliament, where it could be

amended before lawmakers vote to approve it as law.

The government has toughened the legislation since it was first written after a committee of lawmakers recommended improvements. Changes include giving users more power to block anonymous trolls, requiring porn sites to verify users are 18 or older, and making cyberflashing — or sending someone unsolicited graphic images — a criminal offense.

Tech executives would be criminally liable two months after the law takes force, instead of two years afterward as proposed in the original draft.

Companies could be fined up to 10% of their annual global revenue for viola-

tions.

There's also a wider range of criminal offenses that could result in prison sentences of up to two years in the updated draft.

Initially, tech executives faced prison time for failing to quickly provide regulators with accurate information needed to assess whether their companies are complying with the rules.

Now, they would also face it for suppressing, destroying or altering information requested or not cooperating with regulators, who would have the power to enter a tech company's premises to inspect data and equipment and interview employees.

Tech companies would have to proactively take down illegal content involving revenge porn, hate crime, fraud, ads for drugs or weapons, suicide promotion or assistance, human trafficking and sexual exploitation, on top of the originally proposed terrorism and child sexual abuse material.

The government said it would outline categories of harmful but legal material that the biggest online platforms such as Google and Facebook would have to tackle, instead of leaving it up to the "whim of internet executives."

That's aimed at addressing concerns of digital ac-

tivists who worried the law would crimp freedom of speech and expression because companies would be overzealous in removing material that upsets or offends people but isn't prohibited. □

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NASCAR and Hendrick to partner on 24 Hours of Le Mans entry

By JENNA FRYER

SEBRING, Fla. (AP) — NASCAR and Hendrick Motorsports have partnered on an effort to enter the 24 Hours of Le Mans next year with a modified version of its new Next Gen car.

The collaborative effort announced Thursday at Sebring International Raceway seeks the "Garage 56" entry, which was created in 2012 as a special single-entry class reserved for innovative cars. The Garage 56 entry allows for the testing of new technologies, creativity and innovation without claiming a spot on the traditional starting grid. "We're not taking this lightly. This is a full bore, full blown effort to run 24 hours and to run competitive times," said Rick Hendrick, the winningest team owner in NASCAR history. "We're not going over there to ride around. We're going to put the best effort out there and run very competitively and finish the race. That's a tall order. I feel strongly that we can do it."

NASCAR still needs an invitation from l'Automobile Club de l'Ouest, the organizer of the 24 Hours of Le Mans, but it seemed a formality based on the magnitude of the announcement Thursday. Pierre Fillon, president of ACO, participated in the event alongside Jim France, chairman of both NASCAR and IMSA.

"Garage 56 is a car dedicated to innovation. We need something innova-



In a photo provided by IMSA, NASCAR President Steve Phelps; IMSA and NASCAR CEO Jim France; Rick Hendrick, Jim Campbell of Chevrolet; Stu Grant of Goodyear; ACO President Pierre Fillon; and IMSA President John Doonan gather at the announcement of a 2023 LeMans "Garage 56" program featuring a NASCAR Chevrolet Camaro car from Hendrick Motorsports.

Associated Press

five. When Jim told me there will be a new generation of cars in NASCAR, with using a hybrid system, he had this crazy idea to enter this car as a Garage 56 in 2023, I was immediately enthusiastic," Fillon said. "I think this new generation of NASCAR with the hybrid system is innovative. This is the future of NASCAR. This car will bring some wonderful memories to the fans."

"We have to convince the Selection Committee in 2023, but I'm sure with a high-level team behind this project, you will take on this challenge. I'm very confi-

dent."

NASCAR last participated at Le Mans, the most prestigious sports car race in the world, in 1976 when series founder Bill France cut a deal to bring two cars to the endurance race in the newly-created Grand International class. Hershel McGriff both owned and drove the Dodge Charger that entered the race, while Junie Donlavey sent a Ford Torino driven by Richard Brooks and Dick Hutcherson.

The 2023 entry will be a modified version of the Next Gen Chevrolet Camaro ZL1

race car. NASCAR, Hendrick Motorsports, Chevrolet, IMSA, and Goodyear all worked on the project, with technical elements of the car and the team's driver lineup expected at a later date. The Next Gen debuted this season as NASCAR's newest Cup car.

The panel assembled for Thursday's announcement couldn't discuss possible driver lineups — a team is required to have at least three drivers and no more than four — or if current NASCAR drivers will be able to compete. France turned to NASCAR president Steve

Phelps, who oversees the creation of the annual schedule, to inquire about an open week on the Cup schedule that would free some drivers to travel to France for the event.

"I think it would be nice to have a mix. We've talked about it a lot, if the calendar works out, we'll just wait and see what's available," said Hendrick. "But we've got from the IMSA drivers a lot of drivers that have Le Mans experience. Especially with Chevrolet's involvement, we'll be covered with drivers. But we would like to see a Cup driver in the system if we could."

Hendrick then joked he'd like to use four-time NASCAR champion Jeff Gordon, who is retired now and the vice chairman of Hendrick Motorsports. Gordon turns 51 in August. He also said he'd be willing to use seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson, who put together the IMSA endurance team Hendrick has run since last season.

"We're going to put Gordon on a diet and get him in there," Hendrick said. "I haven't talked to Jimmie yet. I'm sure he would do it if he doesn't have a conflict."

France, who succeeded his father, brother and finally nephew before taking on NASCAR's top job, said bringing the Next Gen to Le Mans was a tribute to his late father and older brother, who like him were huge fans of sports car racing. □

Blackmore 1st female jockey to win Cheltenham Gold Cup



Rachael Blackmore celebrates winning the Boodles Cheltenham Gold Cup Chase on A Plus Tard during day four of the Cheltenham Festival at Cheltenham Racecourse, England, Friday, March 18, 2022.

Associated Press

CHELTENHAM, England (AP) — Rachael Blackmore became the first female jockey to win the prestigious Cheltenham Gold Cup when she rode A Plus Tard to victory on Friday.

A Plus Tard, a 3-1 favorite, stormed up the hill for a comfortable victory as the pair avenged last year's second-place finish behind fellow Henry de Bromhead-trained runner Minella Indo. Minella Indo led by about three lengths at the penultimate fence but A Plus Tard closed the gap and

took the lead on the final jump before winning by 15 lengths.

Alex Ferguson-owned Protektorat nosed out Galvin for third, about two lengths behind Minella Indo.

Last season, the 32-year-old Blackmore became the first woman to win the Champion Hurdle and Grand National.

"I've had so many special days. I wouldn't swap the Grand National for anything but this is the Gold Cup," the Irish jockey told ITV Racing. "I wish I had

something better to say right now. I just can't.

"You have all these plans about how things are going to work out," Blackmore continued. "Racing doesn't let that happen all the time and for some reason it's happened to me today. I just can't explain how lucky I feel." Being attached to De Bromhead's stable "is just absolutely phenomenal," she said.

"To give me this horse is unbelievable," Blackmore said. "I don't know what to say." □

AP source: Deshaun Watson changes mind, joining Browns

By **TOM WITHERS**
AP Sports Writer

Deshaun Watson changed his mind. The Browns have their franchise quarterback, one with some extra heavy baggage.

Watson decided to waive his no-trade clause and the controversial QB accepted a trade to Cleveland after previously rejecting the team, a person familiar with the decision told The Associated Press on Friday. Watson, who didn't play last season for Houston, had informed the Browns on Thursday that he wasn't coming. However, he had a change of heart and called the team Friday, said the person who spoke on condition of anonymity because the team has not announced the imminent trade.

The Browns are paying a hefty price for Watson, sending the Texans three first-round draft picks along with a third- and fourth-rounder for the 26-year-old. Cleveland will also get back a fifth-rounder from Houston with Watson.

Watson posted a photo on Instagram of him wearing a No. 4 Browns jersey and flexing. He wrote: "Cleveland, LETSSSS GOOOO!! #DawgPound Ready To Work!"



In this Dec. 27, 2020, file photo, Houston Texans quarterback Deshaun Watson throws a pass during an NFL football game against the Cincinnati Bengals in Houston.

Associated Press

Watson will be joining a Cleveland team with plenty of talent, but one that underachieved last season and has been in search of a franchise quarterback for years. The three-time Pro Bowler became a target of the Browns after a grand jury declined to indict him on sexual misconduct claims made by 22 women. Watson is still dealing with civil lawsuits from the women, massage therapists who accused him of assault and harassment. He's

also facing a likely suspension by the NFL for violating the league's personal conduct policy.

His arrival in Cleveland will likely be met with a backlash by some fans, but the Browns are comfortable with his character after doing their own investigation. ESPN first reported Watson's decision.

Watson will receive a five-year, \$230 million guaranteed contract, according to NFL Network.

The Browns' public pursuit

of Watson angered incumbent starter Baker Mayfield, who requested a trade. Cleveland turned down Mayfield's demand before learning Watson had agreed to waive his no-trade clause and jump to the AFC North.

Mayfield will likely be dealt in the next few days and there are several teams that may be interested in signing the 26-year-old. He struggled last season after injuring his left shoulder in Week 2, but has shown he's

capable of being a quality starter after leading the Browns to the playoffs in 2020.

Indianapolis, New Orleans and Seattle are among the possible landing spots for Mayfield.

After the Browns were initially rejected by Watson, the team was trying to figure out how to mend a broken relationship with him. That's no longer necessary as Cleveland's focus will shift to welcoming Watson. Watson had also been courted by Atlanta, Carolina and New Orleans. Cleveland seemed to have the longest odds to get him, but he was intrigued by their talented roster, which includes star defensive end Myles Garrett and running back Nick Chubb.

Cleveland's pursuit of Watson must have been helped by the team signing free agent wide receiver Amari Cooper last week as well. Browns owners Dee and Jimmy Haslam have spent the entirety of their tenure trying to find the right quarterback. The team had tried almost every possible avenue, signing veteran free agents and drafting college stars like Johnny Manziel and Mayfield, who was selected first overall in 2018. □

Penn's Thomas becomes first transgender woman to win NAAs

By **CHARLES ODUM**
AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — Lia Thomas took control in the final 100 yards of the 500-yard freestyle to make history Thursday as the first transgender woman to win an NCAA swimming championship.

Thomas, the University of Pennsylvania senior who entered the NCAA women's swimming and diving championships as the top seed, had a season-best time of 4 minutes, 33.24 seconds.

"I didn't have a whole lot of expectation for this meet," said Thomas, a former male swimmer for Pennsylvania. "I was just happy to be here and race and compete the best I could."

Virginia's Emma Weyant was second at 4:34.99.

The race was close until the final 100 yards, with Weyant and Erica Sullivan of Texas pushing Thomas for the lead. The three swam in lanes three through five, adding to the drama, with Thomas in the middle.

As was the case in Thursday morning in a preliminary win, Thomas was stronger at the end. She won the preliminary race at 4:33.82. Sullivan was third at 4:35.92. Stanford's Brooke Forde was fourth at 4:36.18.

Thomas also is the top seed in the 200 freestyle Friday and is the 10th seed in the 100 freestyle Saturday.

Thomas has followed NCAA and Ivy League rules since she began her

transition in 2019 by starting hormone replacement therapy.

The inclusion of the transgender swimmer created controversy, even within the sport. There were fewer than 10 protesters outside the Georgia Tech facility, and some carried banners which read "Save Women's Sports" in the stands.

"I try to ignore it as much as I can," Thomas said. "I try to focus on my swimming .. and just try to block out everything else."

Thomas spoke with ESPN immediately after the race but would not participate in the official news conference, as required by the NCAA.

Since participation is required, possible action



Pennsylvania's Lia Thomas competes in a preliminary heat in the 500-yard freestyle at the NCAA women's swimming and diving championships Thursday, March 17, 2022, in at Georgia Tech in Atlanta.

Associated Press

could come following evaluation by the NCAA's swimming and diving championships committee.

Tennessee's Julia Mrozinski won the consolation final with a time of 4:37.35. Northwestern's Lola Mull was second. □

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